HISTORY OF DAVID FELT AND STATIONERS' HALL PRESS

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FELTVILLE/GLENSIDE PARK: ARCHITECTURAL HISTORY AND PRESERVATION

The Feltville/Glenside Park community, with its ten surviving buildings, provides a glimpse into the industrial and recreational development of rural New Jersey in the nineteenth century. The importance of the community lies largely in the existence of buildings from the mill village of Feltville and from the resort community of Glenside Park. These structures are interesting in their own right, but their survival amidst a natural landscape adds immeasurably to their significance.

The history of settlement in the Feltville area can be traced back to the Colonial Period, but it was the arrival of David Felt in 1845 that set the stage for the development of the site. David Felt (1793-1873) was a descendant of George Felt who is thought to have arrived in Salem, Massachusetts in 1628 and to have been one of the earliest settlers of Charlestown, Massachusetts.[1] David Felt was born in Milton, Massachusetts and established a stationery business in Boston in 1815. Known as Stationers' Hall, the company moved to Pearl Street in New York City in about 1825. In c.1834 the business became incorporated as David Felt & Co. with the addition of David's brother, Willard Felt, to the firm. Approximately five years later the company opened a factory on Front Street in Brooklyn, in the area now located beneath the Brooklyn and Manhattan bridges. David Felt & Co. and Stationers' Hall were dealers in and manufacturers of stationery items and blank books. Advertisements for the firm, printed in the 1830s and 1840s, note that they manufactured and printed blank books (account books, ledgers, etc.), ink, bills of exchange, certificates of deposit, almanacs, stationery, visiting cards, business cards, playing cards, and similar items. The Manhattan store, and a branch in New Orleans, sold these goods as well as imported English and French stationery, quills, sealing wax, and "every article belonging to the [stationery] business, required by Book sellers, Stationers, Fancy Goods Dealers, Bankers, Merchants, and by the public generally."[2] Felt's company had the ability to undertake both printing and binding, but, it should be noted, Stationers' Hall was not a book publishing establishment. On rare occaisions the firm published special volumes, but they were never listed in business directories under the headings of printers or publishers.[3]

In about 1842 David Felt moved to Brooklyn, at first residing near his factory (he appears to have rented at local boarding houses). Soon after, Felt moved into a row house on Strong Place in the South Brooklyn (now Cobble Hill) area. Meanwhile, Willard Felt remained in Manhattan and appears to have been responsible for the operation of the retail store on Pearl Street. In the early 1840s a second shop, at 34 Wall Street, was established.[4]

David Felt purchased land in Union County, New Jersey in 1845 and moved his manufacturing operations from Brooklyn to a new settlement which was dubbed Feltville. Apparently, the operation of a factory in New Jersey and two stores in New York overwhelmed the brothers, since in the 1848-49 New York City Directory the firm is listed as both David Felt & Co. and David Felt & Co. & Hosford. Frederick J. Hosford seems to have been placed in charge of the Wall Street store, while Willard ran the store on Pearl Street (now at 191 Pearl Street); David

had charge of the New Jersey operations. This arrangement lasted for about two years when Willard left the firm and established an independent stationery business. The circumstances of the breakup are not known, but Willard retained the Pearl Street shop with David Felt & Co. & Hosford opening a new establishment at 174 Pearl Street, while continuing in business at 50 Wall Street (the Pearl Street store, which later moved to William Street, was known as David Felt & Co.; only the Wall Street store had the Hosford name). By 1854-55 Hosford had left the company and, like Willard, had opened his own stationery business. In that year David Felt & Co. was located at 24 Beekman Street, Willard Felt was at 191 Pearl Street, and Hosford was at 35 Wall Street. In the following year, Willard took his son, Willard L. Felt, into partnership, and his firm became known as Willard Felt & Co.

David Felt appears to have become interested in the New Jersey site in 1844 and in 1845 he purchased the property and its water rights. The land that Felt bought was in an undeveloped rural area with none of the support facilities necessary for the operation of a successful factory. Therefore, after buying the property, Felt established a complete mill village modeled after those founded by New England merchants for the manufacture of cotton and woolen goods. By 1845, industrial villages such as that Felt planned had become well established in the American industrial landscape. Self-contained industrial communities consisting of a mill located at a water source, a mill-owners mansion, a variety of housing types for skilled and unskilled mill workers, a church, a company store, and auxiliary buildings first appeared in America in the early years of the nineteenth century. One of the earliest experiments at creating an industrial community occurred at Paterson, New Jersey in the late eighteenth century where Alexander Hamilton unsuccessfully attempted to found a "National Manufactury." It was at Humphreysville, Connecticut that the first successful mill town appeared (1803).[5] This town was soon followed by others located along the rivers of New England. Many of the early mill towns, such as Waltham and Lowell, were founded by Boston merchants and Felt was undoubtedly aware of these communities. The success of the mill town formula led to its adaptation outside of New England. Feltville is one of the few mill towns to survive in New Jersey with both buildings and surroundings intact.[6]

The new village of Feltville consisted of simple, but stylish wooden buildings. A large mill, smaller mill building, and related raceways and dams were constructed along Blue Brook. For upper echelon workers Felt erected semi-detached cottages, while the lower level workers are thought to have been housed in dormitory facilities. In addition, Felt built a mansion for his own use, a combination church and company general store (a post office was later incorporated into this building), a school, and support structures. Like many of the smaller mid nineteenth-century mill towns, Feltville was a largely self-contained paternalistic unit. The residents worked in Felt's mill or on the farm which he ran in conjunction with the mill village; all needed goods could be purchased at Felt's store (workers were probably required to shop here as they were at most mill towns); a church, probably with compulsory attendance, was provided, as was a small school. Everyone was expected to follow the rules and regulations laid down by Felt.

The surviving Feltville-era buildings (eight cottages and the church/store) are not high-style works of architecture, but are handsome vernacular Greek Revival style structures that reflect the general architectural taste of the 1840s. Typical of Greek Revival work, the buildings are simple and somewhat austere, exemplifying the restraint and geometric precision of Greek Revival design. This is particularly evident in such features as the symmetry of each

design, the use of small rectangular windows to light the top floor of most of the homes, the presence of simple wooden window and doorway enframements, and of extremely restrained mantels.

A large percentage of the goods sold in David Felt's store were manufactured at his Feltville factory. In addition to stocking his store with goods from Feltville, the firm's products were sent to the Felt outlet in New Orleans, and, by mailorder, throughout the country. There is every reason to believe that Stationers' Hall prospered while the manufactury was located at Feltville.[7] Unaccountably, however, in 1860 David Felt closed the Feltville works, sold his New Jersey holdings to Amasa Foster, and transferred the name Stationers' Hall to J.A.H. Hasbrouck. The reason for Felt's action has long been a matter of speculation. It has been suggested that the Civil War caused financial problems for Felt who was involved in trading with the South.[8] This explanation is not very convincing. The Feltville factory was closed several months before the outbreak of hostilities, and, although there was talk of war, very few people had any idea that if war came between the North and South it would be as bloody and long-lasting as it was. Businesses do not appear, in general, to have been affected by pre-war tensions and many northern manufacturers were unprepared for the outbreak of hostilities. New England textile mills, for example, which relied on raw materials from the South, were not affected until after the war began, at which time those companies that had not stocked up on raw cotton had to seriously curtail operations.[9] Felt's factory was closed before Fort Sumpter and it appears to have been mere coincidence that this occurred in the same year as the opening salvos of the Civil War.

It is possible that the simplest explanation is the correct one. David Felt was sixty-seven years old in 1860. Although twice married, Felt had no children and no direct heir.[10] The difficulty of running a complete industrial operation and mill village, as well as a retail shop in Manhattan, many have led to the decision to leave New Jersey and return to retail trade in New York City. This may have been coupled with the fact that factories powered by water were beginning to be replaced by more reliable and economical steam-powered works. These new factories were located closer to urban markets and important transportation hubs and were, therefore, more successful than factories in rural areas that relied on the vagaries of water power.

In addition, there appear to have been problems in the Felt family at this time and it is worth speculating as to their impact on David's business. In the New York City Directory of 1861-62, the first volume published after the sale of Feltville, David Felt's store appears, but no home address is listed. The same is true of David's brother and former partner Willard Felt who had previously been listed as a resident of Harlem and West Farms (Westchester County; now part of the Bronx). On March 1, 1862 Willard Felt died and it is possible that he was sick for some time before this. Immediately before or after Willard's death, David Felt & Co. and Willard Felt & Co. joined forces in a single store at 14 Maiden Lane. The ill health of Willard Felt may have brought David back to New York and his death (or impending death) appears to have been responsible for the merger of the two family stationery firms. This merger was short-lived, however, for in about 1864 the firm split again. In 1865-66 David is listed as running a storage business in Brooklyn; in 1867-68 he had returned to the stationery business, maintaining a stationery store until his death in 1873. Willard Felt's son and heir, Willard L. Felt, ran the other family stationery business.

As has been noted, in 1860 David Felt not only sold the New Jersey property, but also gave up use of the name Stationers' Hall. For the first time, in

1860-61, Stationers' Hall is listed under the name of J.A.H. Hasbrouck & Co., stationery, lithographer, printer, and blank book manufacturers. Julian Augustus Hardin Hasbrouck disappears from the directories in 1862-63 and the Hasbrouck family genealogy does not include his date of death. Without Felt family documents, it is impossible, at the present time, to establish conclusively what precipitated the changes to Feltville, Stationers' Hall, and the Felt family's various stationery interests in the early 1860s.

David Felt had sold the Feltville property to Amasa Foster who retained title until 1864 when he sold the land and its buildings to Samuel P. Townsend. Townsend is said to have attempted to manufacture sarsaparilla, grow commercial fruit crops, and cultivate tobacco for cigars. All of these pursuits appear to have failed and in 1882 Townsend sold the property to Warren Ackerman who, along with Frank Hasniger and Mr. and Mrs. Frank Molloy, converted the mill town into a summer resort called Glenside Park. Ackerman also ran a farm on the property. The Glenside Park era, which lasted until 1916, is the second period of major importance to the architectural history of the village. By the 1880s, the railroad had reached the Feltville area making the town accessible and convenient for vacationers from New York, Newark, and other nearby urban centers. The property that Ackerman purchased contained a group of outmoded buildings located amidst forest and farmland. In order to create a successful resort from the old industrial village it was necessary to add conveniences such as electricity, paved roads, walks, sewers, water, and recreational facilities such as golf, tennis, croquet, and baseball grounds. Most importantly, the old fashioned Feltville buildings had to be modernized. The sober, forty year old buildings were not demolished and replaced by new construction; rather a campaign was undertaken to modernize the structures by adding an inexpensive veneer of stylish rustic ornamentation. The basic form of each old building was maintained, but new porches and other small details were attached to each. The porches added to the houses and the porches and cupola placed on the old church/general store were constructed of natural tree branches. The use of these natural elements lent a fitting air of insouciance to what had been a series of austere Greek Revival structures. The rustic naturalistic design elements used at Glenside Park were popular for late nineteenth and early twentieth century resort and vacation structures. The forms are usually associated with the Adirondacks of New York State and this may be the major appearance of such design motifs in New Jersey. In addition to the new porches, the residential buildings received dormer windows which made the upper floor of each building more liveable. One house also received an angled Queen Anne style oriel with small-paned window sash. Complementing the rustic additions to the older buildings was a large wooden stable erected to house the horses and some of the staff of the resort.

The advent of automobiles in the early years of the twentieth century and the concurrent growth of seaside and mountain resorts farther from the metropolitan area caused the closure of Glenside Park in 1916. The surviving buildings were sold to private owners and eventually much of the area was acquired by Union County. Although suffering from benign neglect, the remaining Feltville/Glenside Park buildings have undergone few alterations on the exterior. They remain an important part of the architectural and historic patrimony of New Jersey and of Union County, in particular.

Preservation at Feltville/Glenside Park

The Feltville/Glenside Park buildings and their surrounding landscape should be treated with great care and respect. Intervention, especially on the exterior of each of the ten surviving buildings, should be kept to an absolute minimum.

The eventual fate of each building will, of course, depend of the use that is found for the village. Whatever work is undertaken to adapt Feltville/Glenside Park to new uses must take into consideration the architectural character of this National Register listed community.

Although the history of Feltville/Glenside Park has been divided into ten periods,[12] only two are of major concern to the architectural development of the area. Both the Feltville era and the Glenside Park era are of great importance and the architectural remains of both periods need to be treated with equal respect. We are fortunate in that the nine surviving Feltville buildings were not drastically altered when the village was converted into a summer resort. Rather, the old buildings were embellished with rustic detail which has not hidden their original form. Thus, each building clearly illustrates its place in two unrelated ventures. Each building acts as part of the unfolding historic drama of the site and, as such, each is a perfect educational tool. The removal of Glenside Park material from the buildings in order to restore them to a Feltville period look should be undertaken only after very careful study and after a complete scheme for the reuse of the community has been established. Unless Feltville/Glenside Park is to be used as a purely educational (i.e. museum) community any alterations entailing the removal of porches and dormers would be questionable. If a decision is made to restore a building to its complete Feltville appearance, one of the cottages with the least amount of rustic ornament should be chosen and its present condition should be carefully documented. Under no circumstances should the Glenside Park porches and cupola be removed from the building erected by David Felt for use as his church and general store. This is a unique structure on the property and the addition of the cupola clearly continues and clarifies the original use of the building.

For a full understanding of the history of Feltville/Glenside Park, it is important to institute a scheme of interpreting certain aspects of the community which have disappeared. This is particularly true of the Feltville period since many of the major structures from this era have been torn down. The most notable buildings that are missing are the mill, the Felt mansion, the dormitories, and the school. A method of dealing with these structures is important to a successful interpretation of the mill village and the life of its inhabitants. The main mill is the most important missing feature since it was the reason for the original construction of the entire village. The foundations of the mill survive, as do photographs of the building. The simplest interpretive program for the mill would be to clear and stabilize the foundations, partially restore the raceways and dam, and install illustrative documentation to explain the original appearance and use of the building. It has been suggested that the mill could be reconstructed on the original foundations. This is certainly a possibility if a large building with open spaces is needed for the revitalization of the community. However, in accord with contemporary preservation opinion, a reconstruction of the building as an imitation of the old mill should be avoided. The National Park Service has issued guidelines for the reconstruction of buildings in which it is stated that "the Service does not endorse, support, or encourage the reconstruction of historic structures."[13] The standards for reconstruction note that no surface or subsurface remains should be destroyed and that such work only be undertaken if this is "the only alternative permitting appreciation of the historical or cultural association" of the site.[14] At Feltville/Glenside Park there are several alternatives, including the design of a modern building that is repectful of and complementary to the original building and to its surroundings. As an alternative, consideration should be given to the reconstruction of the structural frame of the mill. This abstracted wooden form would clearly illustrate the size, scale, use, and importance of the mill to the Feltville community. It should be noted that a reconstruction of the mill would be difficult to interpret since it is not known how the interiors were divided or how they were used.

Archaeological excavations should be undertaken to establish the size and exact location of the Felt mansion and should be used to determine if dormitories

were actually built. These buildings are extremely important since, along with the extant cottages, they illustrate the different levels of accomodation in the town. The school building is also of interest, although it is, perhaps, not as important as other buildings in establishing the living patterns of Feltville's residents. The foundation lines of the lost buildings should be marked in a clear manner in order to create a complete idea of the nineteenth century appearance of Feltville/Glenside Park.

The landscaping of the area should take into account the existing buildings and the important demolished structures. A complete inventory of extant historic plantings (trees as well as shrubs) needs to be undertaken. New plantings and the clearing of growth should complement the physical remnants of the community. The premise which should guide the reuse and restoration work at Feltville/Glenside Park is that the smallest amount of intervention with historic fabric is the best. A surprising amount of historic material survives and this should not be tampered with. The preservation of the old structures and their adaptation for the needs of the future will again make Feltville/Glenside Park a dynamic part of the heritage of New Jersey.

[1]John E. Morris, compiler, The Felt Genealogy: A Record of the Descendants of George Felt of Casco Bay (Hartford: Press of the Case, Lockwood & Brainard Co., 1893).

[2]Sheldon and Co.'s Business or Advertising Directory (NY: John F. Trow & Co., 1845), p.148.

[3]Only one book is known to have been published at Feltville, John Littell's Genealogies of the Passaic Valley of 1851. Clearly, this work was of special local interest and its printing was a rare venture for the Feltville works.

[4]The New York City Directory of 1842-43 listed David Felt & Co. at 245 Pearl Street and, for the first time, at 34 Wall Street as well. Willard Felt's name is listed for 245 Pearl Street only. Beginning in 1844-45, David Felt & Co. is listed at 34 Wall and 245 Pearl, in that order, while Willard's addresses are reversed--245 Pearl and 34 Wall. It would appear that David was responsible for the Wall Street store and Willard for the Pearl Street store.

[5]Steve Dunwell, The Run of the Mill (Boston: David R. Godine, 1978), p.19.

[6]Feltville follows the tradition established at many of the New England mill towns, in that it was named for the factory owner. Other examples are Humpreysville, Lowell, Harrisville, Cabotsville, and Lawrence.

[7]One curious note is that in the New York City Directory for the years 1856-57 and 1857-58 David Felt & Co. fails to appear. When the company reappeared in 1858-59 it had moved from Beekman Street to Maiden Lane.

[8]It has been noted that Felt did "business mostly with the South" ("Guided Tour of Glenside Village in Connection with N.J. Tercentenary, 1964-1965"). I have seen no conclusive evidence to point to the preeminence of southern trade in the Felt business.

[9]Dunwell, pp. 103-4.

[10]Morris, p. 155.

[11]Willard died without a will. His estate was administered at the Westchester

County Surrogate's Court, White Plains, New York in 1862 (Administration No. 48-1862). Willard's estate was appraised at $45,038.50. An interesting feature of the adminstration is the note that Amasa Foster, to whom David Felt sold the Feltville property, was involved in a suit with Willard. Willard Felt claimed damages against foster for taking a horse worth $400.

[12]"Guided Tour...".

[13]National Park Service, "Cultural Resources Management Guideline NPS-28" Release No. 3, August 1985, chapter 3, page 9.

[14]Ibid.